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### Costume design professor takes center stage as interim dean

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University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "Costume design professor takes center stage as interim dean" (1998). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 15713.  
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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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"This release is available electronically on INN (News Net)."

Oct. 27, 1998

**CORRECTION:** This replaces an earlier version of this release. The headline and parts of the text have been changed. Please use this corrected version.

**Contact:** Chris Milodragovich, interim dean, School of Fine Arts, (406) 243-2871.

### **COSTUME DESIGN PROFESSOR TAKES CENTER STAGE AS INTERIM DEAN**

#### **MISSOULA--**

When Christine Milodragovich was asked to design the costumes for her first play, "Whoopee-Ti-Yi-Yo," back in 1989, the former home economics teacher was petrified.

"I was just as green as any student," Milodragovich said. "I gulped and said yes."

Now, after working on costumes for more than 50 productions, she's an old pro. She speaks of "building" costumes as if they were made of wood and nails instead of fabric and feathers and glitter and glue. She's also interim dean of the School of Fine Arts at The University of Montana-Missoula.

Milodragovich first came to UM in 1973 as a home economics instructor specializing in clothing and textiles. She had received her training at Washington State University, where she worked as a teaching assistant while completing her master's degree.

"By the time I got out of grad school, I knew I wanted to teach," she said. "I enjoyed seeing the lightbulb go on for people."

When offered the job in Montana, Milodragovich thought she'd stay two years tops. Now she's celebrating her 25th anniversary at UM. She's made a few changes along the way, including a switch from home economics to fine arts when the former was phased out of the



curriculum.

That was scary, she said, but also “incredibly invigorating.”

Milodragovich, a warm, nurturing woman, went out of her way to learn about theater -- sitting in on classes, attending departmental meetings and volunteering to work on productions. By the time the opportunity to do “Whoopee-Ti-Yi-Yo” came along, she knew enough to get by.

“What I quickly found out was that I had a bag of tricks -- a set of skills -- that could be applied to theater,” she said in her soft, articulate voice. “My lack of knowledge about theater history and literature would take care of itself.”

While she’s learned the theatrical ropes, she’s also worked her way up through the ranks of instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, full professor, co-chair of the Department of Drama/Dance, and now interim dean. She hasn’t decided whether to throw her hat in the ring for the position of dean, but says she’s enjoyed filling in “most of the time.”

It’s clear, though, that creating is her first love. On a tour of the School of Fine Art’s Costume Shop -- where, as Milodragovich explains, costumes are “built” -- she shows off the giant dye vat, the industrial sewing machines, the baskets of color-coordinated thread. She stops to talk to a man who is doing a rush sewing job -- a small white shirt for a play opening that evening.

“I really enjoy working in the Costume Shop, side-by-side with students,” she said. “It’s different than going into a classroom.”

Next door to the Costume Shop is one of several costume storage areas. Racks of clothing -- vests, jackets, dresses -- share space with dozens of black shoes, neatly lined up in



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row after row on wooden shelves, and curiously labeled boxes: "Spats," "Bum rolls."

Milodragovich demonstrates a bum roll, tying the white, sausage-shaped pillow around her backside, describing the Elizabethan dress that would be worn over it.

Milodragovich, who has designed costumes for everything from "Cabaret" to "A Midsummer Night's Dream" to, most recently, "A Whale for the Killing," enjoys the mental challenge of "building" costumes.

"Every show presents its own opportunity to be a good problem-solver," she said.  
"You have to have that attitude of 'I think I can figure this out.'"

Costume design requires hard work and long hours, she added, and offers little public recognition.

"If you're excited about the end product then that's your reward," she said.

However, for those who love a creative challenge, design technology skills like costuming, scene construction and stage lighting are in high demand.

UM fine arts design/technology graduates have gone on to careers in film, video, television, opera, ballet and theater. One former student even landed a job with MTV in New York City, while another went to work for the San Francisco Ballet, Milodragovich said.

"Students in the technology area are highly employable," she said.

Design/technology is an option available with bachelor's and master's degrees offered through the School of Fine Arts' Department of Drama/Dance. For more information, call the School of Fine Arts at (406) 243-4970.

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